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Nathan Fretwell

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# Anarchist education and the paradox of pedagogical authority

Nathan Fretwell 

Department of Education, Middlesex University, London, UK

## ABSTRACT

This article interrogates a key feature of anarchist education; focusing on a problem with implications not only for anarchist conceptions of education, but for anarchist philosophy and practice more broadly. The problem is this: if anarchism consists in the principled opposition to all forms of coercive authority, then how is this to be reconciled with situations where justice demands the use of coercion in order to protect some particular good? It seems that anarchist educators are forced to deny coercive authority in principle, whilst at the same time affirming it in practice. This is the paradox of pedagogical authority in anarchist education. Coercive authority is simultaneously impossible and indispensable. Exploring this paradox through a reading of Jacques Derrida's later work, and, in particular, his conception of justice as requiring openness to the singular situation, I argue that in exercising their authority anarchist educators encounter the aporetic moment in anarchism, experiencing what Derrida calls 'the ordeal of the undecidable'. Understood this way, the paradox becomes less an indication of anarchism's limitations than it does its value. For it is here that the problem of pedagogical authority is treated with the gravity that all questions of justice deserve.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

There is not in the world a truer object of pity, than a child terrified at every glance, and watching, with anxious uncertainty, the caprices of a pedagogue. (Godwin, 1986, p.142)

This article interrogates a key feature of anarchist education; focusing on a problem with implications both for anarchist conceptions of education and for anarchist philosophy and practice more broadly. The problem is this: if anarchism consists in the principled opposition to all forms of coercive authority, then how is this to be reconciled with situations where justice demands the use of coercion in order to protect some particular good? It seems that anarchist educators are forced to deny coercive authority in principle, whilst at the same time affirming it in practice. This is the paradox of pedagogical authority in anarchist education. Coercive authority is simultaneously impossible and indispensable. I explore this paradox through a reading of Jacques Derrida's later ethical work, and, in particular, his conception of justice as requiring openness to the singular situation (Derrida, 1990). To be open to singularity is to accept the burden of responsibility for taking decisions on an uncertain ethical terrain; a terrain in which there are no

clear guidelines for action. This is the route down which the anarchist pedagogue travels. In exercising her authority, she encounters the aporetic moment in anarchism, experiencing what Derrida calls 'the ordeal of the undecidable' (Derrida, 1990).

The article begins by sketching anarchism's core commitments and surveying anarchist approaches to education. Then, drawing on two case studies—*Escuela Moderna* and *Paideia*—I trace the paradoxical aspects of anarchist education and detail how an engagement with Derrida's later work throws fresh light on its contradictions. I argue that the paradox is inescapable and to evade it is to relinquish responsibility for justice. The challenge for anarchist educators is to remain sensitive to this aporia and the ordeal of having to exercise authority without any guarantees that justice is being served.

## Anarchism: a brief sketch

Anarchism is about freedom and equality. It is about empowering individuals and communities to take direct control of their own affairs without the intervention of political intermediaries. Its goal is the creation of a just, egalitarian social order based on voluntary association, mutual aid, and direct democracy; a social order, that is, without hierarchy, without authority, and without the state.

Central to anarchism is the problem of authority (McLaughlin, 2007). Decried by Bakunin as that which anarchists 'detest with all our heart' (Bakunin, 1970, p. 28), authority, with its connotations of hierarchy and control, is antithetical to anarchist goals. Anarchists do not, however, reject authority *tout court*. For, as Bakunin observed, there are occasions when we rightfully appeal to the authority of others. The authority deriving from specific expertise for example. 'In the matter of boots,' he writes, 'I refer to the authority of the bootmaker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or the engineer' (Bakunin, 1970, p. 32). Here, though, the individual retains her 'incontestable right of criticism and censure' (Bakunin, 1970). She is free to heed the bootmaker's advice or ignore it. Instead, it is 'fixed, constant, and universal authority' (Bakunin, 1970, p. 33) that anarchists reject; authority that is imposed upon individuals and demands obedience. It might be suggested that anarchists recognize the legitimacy of what has been termed *theoretical authority*, authority in knowledge and belief, whilst disclaiming *practical authority*, authority over conduct (Steutel & Spiecker, 2000). However, this distinction is ambiguous. The authority claimed by religious leaders, for instance, often comprises authority over belief *and* conduct. Just as the teacher is expected to be *an authority* where knowledge is concerned and *in authority* in matters of classroom discipline (Peters, 1966, p. 240). Anarchists focus instead on the criterion of coercion. It is *coercive authority* they repudiate—'the power or right to compel the compliance of another against her will' (Jun, 2012, p. 113)—whether concerning beliefs, conduct, or some combination of both.

The core conviction that 'all forms of coercive authority are morally condemnable' (Jun, 2010, p. 51), shapes anarchism's axiological and normative commitments. Its axiology, encompassing liberty, equality, and solidarity, is complemented by a normative dimension comprising an overarching commitment to a principle of anti-authoritarianism. What is *right* for anarchists, what people *ought* to do, is refrain from engaging in any activity that unduly limits the liberty of others or encourages/sustains oppressive social practices. Indeed, anarchism is unthinkable without such a commitment. These norms and values scaffold a prefigurative ethic. If the goal is to establish an egalitarian, horizontal social order, in which coercive authority, hierarchy, and inequality have been eradicated, then the practices adopted by anarchists, including education, must be consistent with this end.



## Anarchism, authority, and education

There is a long history of anarchist involvement in education (Suisse, 2010): including notable schools (e.g. Louise Michel's *International School* (1890–93), Francisco Ferrer's *Escuela Moderna* (1901–06), and Sébastien Faure's *La Ruche* (1904–17)); the early twentieth-century Modern School movement (Avrich, 2006); and anarchist contributions to the Free Schools of the 1960s/70s (Shotton, 1993). More recently, anarchist pedagogies have been revived in Europe and the USA (Haworth, 2012; Haworth & Elmore, 2017; Shantz, 2010) and small pockets of anarchist schooling persist (Fremeaux & Jordan, 2012). Libertarian schools, such as Summerhill, moreover, whilst not consciously anarchist, also reflect anarchist ideals (Gribble, 2012).

Education has special import for anarchists. It is considered vital for social renewal and provides an arena in which mutual aid and direct democracy can be prefiguratively practised (Mueller, 2012). Many anarchists recognize that dismantling existing power structures is not sufficient for securing social change; instead, environmental conditions must be established in which sociability rather than egoism can prevail. A process of 'moral enlightenment' is required (Kropotkin, 1970, p. 102). People must be educated in principles and practices of mutual aid, for without the requisite degree of moral development antisocial tendencies may triumph. Education should hence be geared towards fostering and developing desirable forms of moral conduct, prefiguring utopian visions of the society to come.

Essentially, anarchist education is about eradicating coercive authority to allow people to develop freely according to their own interests and inclinations, whilst practising self-government and mutuality. As James Guillaume envisaged:

No longer will there be schools, arbitrarily governed by a pedagogue, where the children wait impatiently for the moment of their deliverance when they can enjoy a little freedom outside. In their gatherings the children will be entirely free. They will organize their own games, their talks, systematize their own work, arbitrate disputes, etc. They will then easily become accustomed to public life, to responsibility, to mutual trust and aid. The teacher whom they have themselves chosen to give them lessons will no longer be a detested tyrant but a friend to whom they will listen with pleasure. (Guillaume, in Bakunin, 2002, p. 373–4)

Coercive authority is inimical to this endeavour because it is fundamentally asymmetrical, vesting one party with exclusive power to compel obedience from the other, thereby narrowing the scope of free action and foreclosing any prospect of mutuality. Although many commentators conceptualise authority as founded in consent and regard coercion as a particular species of power (Peters, 1966; Steutel & Spiecker, 2000; Wilson, 1992), this distinction is difficult to maintain. It is not simply that power and authority often blur in practice (Haynes, 1987), but that authority itself represents a formally sanctioned configuration of power-relations that licences coercion.

Authority is always authority over something or someone. This differential allocation of capacities and constraints firmly situates authority within the ambit of power, understood as 'the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a non-trivial way' (Allen, 1998, p. 33). The distinctiveness of authority lies in its formalisation of power-relations in a fixed, hierarchical model underscored by official sanction, but its legitimacy derives from the normative framework in which it operates (legal, moral, bureaucratic, etc.) and only indirectly from the putative consent of those subject to it. Nor does the simple fact of obedience automatically indicate acknowledgement of an authority's legitimate right to command, as Steutel and Spiecker (2000) suggest. One is subject to authority irrespective of whether one approves. Indeed, a person may consider an authority illegitimate but faced with the likely repercussions of disobedience comply nonetheless. In such cases, we plausibly consider that person coerced; the chief motive for compliance being the prospect of further sanction. But to describe this as an instance of 'mere' power rather than authority is to ignore the fact that imposing sanctions is the prerogative of authority; it is only by virtue of their status as authorities that authorities are able to marshal the power to secure compliance. Those subject to

authority have little choice but to submit. Coercion is certainly not exclusive to authority, and it is not always necessary, but it is indissociable from it.

Authority is better understood as a form of ‘situated social power’ deriving from an agent’s position within a structured set of relationships which determines ‘the “relative positioning” of social others’ (Wartenberg, 1992, p. 88). Here, a person’s powers are linked directly to their status: the teacher has the authority to detain students after school, whereas school nurses do not. To function, these powers require ‘[a]n entire set of social practices [...] be coordinated in very specific ways’, since ‘in the absence of such an alignment, the power of an agent will be severely limited’ (Wartenberg, 1992, p. 90, 91). Authority offers one such alignment, formally coordinating power relations to constrain possibilities for free action. And where such constraints are considered illegitimate, we rightly speak of coercive authority.

Anarchists seek to eliminate coercion from education settings by reconfiguring pedagogical practices and relationships. The anarchist pedagogue is no longer entitled to compel and coerce. Instead, education becomes grounded in mutuality as a practice of freedom. There is a deeper issue here, however, that troubles the anarchist educational project. Genealogists of education have persuasively documented the centrality of educational institutions to ‘the modern play of coercion over bodies, gestures and behaviour’ (Foucault, 1991a, p. 191). Presented as a ‘benign violence’ (Allen, 2014), education, with its attendant hierarchies and divisions, its principles, moralities and constraints, is condemned ‘as an extensive, invasive form of governmentality’ (Peim, 2013, p. 182); a pervasive technology for moulding citizens’ souls. As a governmental technology, education is all the more effective, it is argued, since coercive methods have been supplanted by, or at least articulated with, techniques for managing and manipulating the conscience of subjects (Hunter, 1994, p. 73; *passim*). On this account, education is unredeemable and even radical educational experiments are complicit with its logic. Efforts to expunge power and authority from the classroom only serve to intensify regulation of pupils’ bodies and behaviours (Hunter, 1994). This issue is taken up below, but first I further develop the account of anarchist education by drawing on two exemplary case studies: Francisco Ferrer’s *Escuela Moderna* and *Paideia*, a small anarchist school in south-western Spain.

### ***Escuela Moderna (1901–1906)***

Francisco Ferrer is the pre-eminent figure in anarchist education. Not least because his ideas spawned a movement in education across Europe and North America in the early twentieth-century (Avrich, 2006; Shotton, 1993). Ferrer keenly opposed ecclesiastical or political control of education. Under their influence, he lamented, the school had ‘become one of the most powerful instruments of servitude in the hands of the ruling class’, dominating ‘children physically, morally, and intellectually, in order to control the development of their faculties in the way desired’ (Ferrer, 1913, pp. 48–49). The Escuela Moderna, conversely, was conceived as a ‘rational school’, opposed to dogmatism and devoted to ‘the purpose of preparing children for their entry into the free solidarity of humanity’ (p. 60). Imbued with moral purpose, the school sought to regenerate society by liberating children from authority and by fostering the moral sensibilities necessary for forging an egalitarian social order. As Ferrer commented, the ‘sole ideal’ of educators should be ‘the training of a generation fitted to establish a really fraternal, harmonious, and just state of society’ (p. 59). The young were to be instructed in ‘sound social duties’, there would be no violence or punishment, and everything would aim at ‘peace, gladness, and fraternity’ (p. 15, 59). Co-education of genders and classes was the norm, and children were free to develop according to their inclinations. Teachers would not impose dogma or demand submission. Whereas ‘[t]he teacher is always imposing, compelling, and using violence,’ Ferrer maintained, ‘the true educator is the man [sic.] who does not impose his own ideas and will on the

child, but appeals to its own energies' (p. 51). This opposition between libertarian and authoritarian pedagogies is a recurring trope across anarchist education.

### ***Paideia (1978–present)***

Similar principles drive Paideia, an overtly anarchist school currently celebrating its fortieth anniversary. As reported by Fremeaux and Jordan (2012), Paideia 'is fundamentally rooted in the notion that anarchism must be *experienced*' (p. 108. Original emphasis). An experiment in living, students are collectively responsible for running the school in collaboration with teachers/adults. The emphasis is on self-government, autonomy, and responsibility. Every aspect of the school is managed without relying upon coercive authority, and, as with Escuela Moderna, moral development is of fundamental importance. Anarchist values are 'central to the life and learning of the school' (Fremeaux & Jordan, 2012). These values—equality; justice; solidarity; freedom; nonviolence; culture; happiness—are practised daily and steer the educational process:

Paideia does not see the process of growing up free as something passive. It is not a relaxed *laissez-faire* attitude where children can simply do whatever they want while the educators remain impassive and value free. It is instead a dynamic exercise, which involves creating a working community that is held by a set of clear values and where the rights of educators and students are acknowledged as equal. (*Ibid.*)

The idea of establishing a self-governing community is thus a key feature of school life. The authority of the pedagogue recedes in the face of the freedom, independence, and autonomy of pupils; replaced by mutuality between adult/child. As Fremeaux and Jordan conclude, '[f]or the pedagogues of Paideia, freedom is an active process, it is the art of developing personalities who have an uninhibited sense of volition embedded within acute consciousness of self and connection to the other' (p. 121).

### **Power and pedagogy**

These examples highlight the moral agenda driving anarchist education. They also demonstrate how anarchists seek to reconfigure pedagogical relationships by substituting authority for freedom and mutuality. This does not mean, however, that power plays no part in anarchist schooling. The pedagogical relationship is itself a power-relation (Foucault, 1980, p. 187). Even in its most libertarian guise it inevitably involves unequal partners and, as Hunter (1994) argues, the governing of conduct and behaviour. To adopt a deliberate programme for directing the conduct of children is to use power proactively to produce a set of desired outcomes; to order, arrange, and structure the pedagogical environment. Herbert Read (1944, p. 24), for instance, urged that education be founded on freedom and trust precisely to 'establish the precepts of mutual aid'. Just as Bakunin (2002, p. 95) advocated inculcating humanist values to create the moral beings of the future. In both cases the exercise of power is apparent.

The concerns raised by genealogists of education point to contradictions in the anarchist educational project. Despite denouncing traditional education as controlling and constraining, and for promoting conservative values, both Paideia and Escuela Moderna effectively serve as moral laboratories for engineering social subjects. In neither case is a *laissez-faire* approach adopted, instead concerted efforts are made to direct and steer conduct for ends, and using means, deemed desirable. A similar governmental logic thus cuts through both libertarian and authoritarian alternatives. It may be, then, that anarchist education is demanding the impossible. Whilst it recasts education in a more 'user-friendly architecture' (Peim, 2013, p. 193), it nevertheless consolidates invasive governmentality. However, beyond an appeal to the originary freedom of the child to create itself *ex nihilo*, it is difficult to see how education, or child-rearing for that matter, could meaningfully dispense with processes of person-formation, key as they are to socialisation and enculturation. Moreover, from the standpoint of ethical and political assessment, it is the

means and ends of government that matter, not governmentality *per se*. Anarchist education might thus be construed as a necessary impossibility; an opening gambit in a longer ‘anarchistic struggle’ to overturn dominant strategies for the ‘governmentality of individualization’ and ‘promote new forms of subjectivity’ (Foucault, 2002, p. 330, 336). The crucial issue, addressed later in relation to coercive authority, centres on *deciding* where, to what extent, and in what way government should be exercised.

Another tension emerges from this anarchist governmentality that has direct bearing on the issue of coercive authority: is there a morally significant distinction between instilling and inculcating, on one hand, and imposing and compelling on the other? The latter, after all, typify the kind of coercive practices anarchists eschew. Ferrer (1913, p. 56), for one, insists that ‘the faculties of the children shall develop freely without subjection to any dogmatic patron’, but even he maintains that,

[O]ur business is to *imprint on the minds of the children* the idea that their condition in the social order will improve in proportion to their knowledge and to the strength they are able to develop; and that the era of general happiness will be the more sure to dawn when they have discarded all religious and other superstitions, which have up to the present done so much harm. (*Ibid.*, p. 65. Author’s emphasis)

This suggests a double movement: the explicit rejection of dogmatic indoctrination and an equally explicit effort to mould character for ends perceived just. Viewed unfavourably, this may appear no less indoctrinating. However, if indoctrination constitutes the intention to teach someone to believe something regardless of the evidence (Snook, 1972), then the charge might be deflected on the grounds that the Escuela Moderna prioritised self-learning within a system based on rational inquiry and scientific observation. Although, ‘[t]he teacher must implant the germs of ideas’, the aim was to develop ‘solid minds, capable of forming their own rational convictions on every subject’ (Ferrer, 1913, p. 20). Moreover, given that all education systems transmit values there is nothing peculiar here about anarchist education. The moral framework of anarchist education is perhaps more suggestive of an ‘initiatory pedagogy’ rather than a concerted programme of indoctrination (McDonough, 2011).

Nevertheless, this issue speaks to the nature of pedagogical power outlined above. Power functions in the educational environment by fostering particular moral perspectives. Transmitted indirectly through pedagogical practices and behaviours, it operates in the liminal space between the authoritarian pedagogue’s ‘imposition’ and the libertarian pedagogue’s ‘imprinting’. But whereas impositions coerce and compel, the pressure exerted by imprinting does not foreclose possibilities for independent agency, it merely guides that agency in specific directions. So, whilst both processes involve power, imprinting is more akin to influence than coercion and hence does not betoken the paradox in anarchist thought. Anarchist governmentality in the sphere of education does not compromise the commitment to resisting coercive authority. What is worthy of further attention, however, is the practical necessity of coercion and its incompatibility with the normative content of anarchism.

## The paradox of pedagogical authority

If anarchism promotes ‘freedom for everybody and in everything, with the only limit of the equal freedom for others’ (Malatesta, 1965, p. 53), then what action is rightly taken in cases that infringe upon this rule? Picture the following scene: Jonny doesn’t get along with the girls in his class. When they are working, he disrupts them. When they are speaking, he interrupts them. He has even taken to insulting the girls using misogynistic slurs. The teacher has reasoned with Jonny, thoroughly explaining the injustice of gender discrimination, and his peers have explained how his actions have affected them. And yet, despite this, his behaviour persists.

What is the anarchist pedagogue to do? Perhaps Jonny could be isolated from the class or have his access to certain activities restricted. Or, if his behaviour continues unabated, perhaps

he could be removed from the school entirely. Each option involves coercion. Jonny likes the school. He doesn't want to be excluded or isolated from his friends. But justice may demand exactly that. And herein lies the problem. Whilst it appears to contravene the 'ethical core' of anarchism, coercion may be necessary and just and the pedagogue compelled to exercise authority coercively to protect the liberty and interests of the wider group.

One can imagine other scenarios in which this problem emerges for the anarchist pedagogue, but Paideia provides a concrete example of the issues at play. Paideia emphasises self-government and freedom for pupils, but there are times when a state of exception is declared, when normal conventions are suspended, and authority is exercised coercively. On such occasions, pupils are placed under *Mandado*—which, roughly translated, means 'to be ordered'—where power is transferred exclusively to adults/teachers (Fremeaux & Jordan, 2012, p. 109). At root, *Mandado* is a punishment; a procedure for correcting aberrant behaviour. However, the *Mandado* is noteworthy not simply for involving coercion, but for the recognition that the governing principles of the school, for a time at least, must be suspended. In other words, there is an acknowledgement of the paradoxical nature of anarchist pedagogy; recognition that the *Mandado* contravenes basic anarchist principles.

Scope clearly exists for authority to function coercively in anarchist educational settings. Indeed, it may be justifiable and necessary. There is something paradoxical, then, about anarchist pedagogy. In principle, coercive authority is impossible, but in practice it is inescapable. In the interests of justice, anarchists are compelled to both deny and affirm coercive authority. This stems from the recognition that sanctions can be enabling *as well as* disabling. To impose a sanction constrains an individual's scope of action and infringes liberty, but at the same time it can serve to protect the liberty of the wider group and hence represent a just course of action.

With what certainty, though, can we be assured that any given exercise of authority is just? To refrain from exercising authority may give rise to injustice; but, mechanically exercising authority, as a matter of course, may prove equally unjust. For Chomsky (2005), this involves determining the legitimate use of power. Anarchism, he suggests, places the burden of proof on authority. The difficulty lies in deciding whether and when this burden has been met. The gravity of this decision and its implications for justice can be approached by considering Derrida's later work, which throws the paradox of anarchist education into sharper relief, revealing it as a necessary aporia with which anarchists must perpetually engage.

### **Derrida and 'the ordeal of the undecidable'**

Throughout his work from the late 1980s onwards, Derrida demonstrates that key concepts in our ethico-political vocabulary are inherently aporetic. In *Force of Law*, this is cashed out in terms of the complex relationship between justice and law. Law, Derrida contends, is of the order of the regular and the calculable. It constitutes 'a system of regular and coded prescriptions' that can be mechanically applied in all instances and to all particular cases (Derrida, 1990, p. 959). Conceived in these terms, however, law and justice are by no means equivalent. On the contrary, 'if the act simply consists of applying a rule, of enacting a program or effecting a calculation,' Derrida writes, 'we might say that it is legal, that it conforms to law, and perhaps, by metaphor, that it is just, but we would be wrong to say that the decision was just' (Derrida, 1990, p. 961). This is because justice is not the mere application of a rule; a rule that would treat all instances equally the same. Justice resists any such codification. It consists in an openness and responsibility to the singular situation; it 'always addresses itself to singularity, to the singularity of the other, despite or even because it pretends to universality' (Derrida, 1990). Or, as one of Derrida's commentators puts it, '[d]oing justice to the case at hand involves an 'unconditional' moment of an attention to singularity that is precisely not governed by rules, but utterly open to the future' (Fritsch, 2011, p. 457).

Norms, rules, laws, etc., function in the register of calculability, of judgements and decisions enacted in accordance with statutory principles backed up by force (for there is no law, Derrida insists, without enforceability—‘law is always an authorized force’ (1990, p. 925)). But if law is ‘the element of calculation,’ justice, on the other hand, ‘is incalculable’ (Derrida 1990, p. 947). The singularity of the situation, the interruption of the singular other, exceeds the scope of calculation. It is impervious to rule, regulation, and even reason. The distinction between law and justice, between the calculable and the incalculable, is not, however, an absolute distinction between two exclusive terms, for this would not constitute an aporia. Rather, the aporia consists in the fact that justice and law, though contradictory, nevertheless require one another. As Derrida (Derrida 1990) writes, ‘it turns out that *droit* [law, right] claims to exercise itself in the name of justice and that justice is required to establish itself in the name of a law that must be “enforced”’ (pp. 959–61). Without justice, we might say, law remains arbitrary, and without law, justice is impotent.

This means there are never any guarantees where justice is concerned. Whilst we may be confident we have acted in full conformity with the law, the same cannot be said for justice. For unlike law, ‘the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule’ (*Ibid.*, p. 947). Indeed, all such assurances vanish when confronted by the singular situation. If justice was simply a matter of applying a pre-existing rule to the situation at hand, there would no longer be scope for freedom or responsibility, as the decision would have been ordained in advance (Derrida, 2005a). The decision *qua* decision can never follow automatically from one’s fidelity to some moral schema, since that would divest oneself of the burden of responsibility and deprive the situation of its singularity. Instead, it operates on an uncertain terrain; a terrain marked by the ‘*experience and experiment of the undecidable*’ (Derrida, 1988, p. 116. Original emphasis). What Derrida highlights here is the decidedly undecidable nature of all decisions. There is no finality to be had in matters of justice. The moment of decision is interrupted by experience of the undecidable, of an incalculable and immeasurable demand for justice. Hence, Derrida’s insistence that ‘[t]here can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and passage by way of the undecidable’ (*Ibid.*).

For Derrida, there is no responsibility or justice without passage through ‘the ordeal of the undecidable.’ The situation always demands a response. A decision must always be taken even if on uncertain terrain. It is a thin line that must trodden in dealings with justice. We are simultaneously confronted with the singular situation (requiring experiment and invention, to reinvent the rule in each case) and the obligation to resist the dangers of the worst, the most perverse forms of calculation. And it is here, in walking this line, ‘in this ‘obligation’ to calculate the incalculable, that the ‘ordeal’ of the undecidable is undergone’ (Gormley, 2012, p. 395). Indeed, it is the gravity of having to decide on uncertain terrain, without any assurances or guarantees, that marks out the ‘ordeal of the undecidable’ as *an ordeal*, as a particularly trying experience.

### The aporetic moment in anarchism

The Derridean account of the ordeal of the undecidable and the aporetic structure of justice throws the situation faced by the anarchist pedagogue into sharper relief. If we return to the principle of anti-authoritarianism specified earlier—*people ought to refrain from engaging in any activity that unduly limits the liberty of others or which encourages and sustains oppressive social practices*—it serves as an unstable foundation for moral judgement in anarchist thought. The caveat ‘unduly’ is significant: we ought not to engage in any practice that *unduly* (i.e. unjustifiably or inappropriately) limits another’s liberty. This suggests that whilst calculation is required—we have to gauge, assess, and work out whether infringing another’s liberty is just—we can never be certain that we have calculated correctly. It is impossible to be certain whether the response is proportionate to the infringement or that due consideration has been paid to the

singularity of the situation. There comes a time when we must intervene, when we have to act, but the decision taken is never guaranteed in advance; unease, doubt, and anxiety persist. This is the 'ordeal' in the ordeal of the undecidable. Nothing can be taken for granted. Actions must be submitted to rigorous scrutiny without any pretension that justice has finally been served. By doing so we remain sensitive to the situation, committing ourselves on an undecidable moral terrain that is always already marked by caveats. If the pedagogue could simply default to an anarchist codex, some exhaustive list of statutes drawn up for regulating school-life down to the minutest detail, then no difficulty would arise in the first place, since, as Derrida recognises, the decision would have already been determined from the outset.

This discussion highlights the aporetic moment in anarchist education and anarchist philosophy more generally. It draws attention to the inseparability of norms and sanctions, and the implications this has for anarchist thought and practice. For whenever we speak of social norms, we also invoke corresponding sanctions, since without the possibility of being held to account for breaching accepted standards, the latter would appear bereft of motivational force. As far as anarchism is concerned, the aporia consists in the fact that even though anarchists are ostensibly opposed to all forms of coercive authority, some degree of coercion (in the form of sanctions proscribing certain behaviours) is nevertheless required to protect and preserve core anarchist principles, such as a respect for 'the equal freedom of others.' How these sanctions are formulated and executed, though, remains a delicate topic.

The problem of authority in anarchism is unavoidable because anarchists are caught between opposing and yet requiring some degree of coercive authority. To redress the violence of an injustice, or to prevent injustice arising, it may be necessary to impose punitive sanctions. This is the aporetic moment in anarchism. Freedom and authority reject and require one another. There is a tension between the need to enforce the authority of anarchist norms and the countervailing commitment to opposing force, authority, and coercion in the name of freedom. Again, the role of the anarchist pedagogue is that of the funambulist; she must walk the tightrope between these two positions, negotiate the fraught path between combatting authority in the name of justice and combatting injustice with authority. The task is to remain sensitive to this aporia, to the challenge posed by having to act without any certainty or guarantees. Anarchy in this sense, like Derrida's conception of justice and democracy, is always '*a venir*', always '*to come*'. The ordeal of the undecidable with respect to pedagogical practice is one we must continually face, it is indicative of the thin line to be trodden in doing justice to justice. This task will not be painless—'It must be difficult to judge and to decide. A decision worthy of the name—that is, a critical and reflective decision—could not possibly be rapid or easy' (Derrida, 2005b, p. 15)—but that is precisely what makes the ordeal an ordeal. It is in this light that the paradox of pedagogical authority in anarchist education should be approached. The normative dimension of anarchism is an unstable, undecidable structure, a guidepost suggesting, but never dictating, the direction of travel. It helps inform our calculations as to what decisions to take and which judgements to make, but without any pretensions that those decisions are conclusive or that justice has been definitively served.

## Conclusion

There is a paradox at the heart of anarchist education. Pedagogical authority is impossible and yet indispensable. It is incompatible with the axiological and normative framework of anarchism and at the same time indispensable. This paradox should not, however, be seen as a sign of a fundamental and fatal flaw in anarchist thought. For as an engagement with Derrida's later ethical work has shown, the aporia in anarchism is a productive one. It speaks to the seriousness with which anarchists treat matters of justice. Indeed, on this reading, the paradox becomes less

an indication of anarchism's failings than it does its value; for it is here that the exercise of pedagogical authority is treated with the gravity that all questions of justice deserve.

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## Notes on contributor

**Nathan Fretwell** is a lecturer in Education and Early Childhood Studies at Middlesex University, London. His research interests include philosophy of education, political philosophy, and sociologies of education, childhood, and the family; with a particular focus on relationships between families and schools, and the politics of family life. He has previously published work in the *British Educational Research Journal* and *Anarchist Studies*, and is currently undertaking research exploring the phenomenon of parental activism in educational contexts.

## ORCID

Nathan Fretwell  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8192-5843>

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